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ABSTRACT

The AVID program, available at 66 sites in San Diego County (California), prepares students from groups underrepresented in postsecondary education for 4-year college eligibility. Secondary-level students participating in the program are enrolled in a college preparatory sequence of courses and one section of AVID, in which tutor-led study groups provide academic support. The study groups, comprising Latinos, African Americans, Caucasians, Pacific Islanders, and Native Americans, use the inquiry method, collaborative learning, and writing as a tool of learning. This paper describes program staff, training, coordination, connections with University of California at San Diego and the State Department of Education, and program evaluation activities. (JDD)

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AVID: A College Preparatory Program for Underrepresented Students

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AVID: A College Preparatory Program for Underrepresented Students

The purpose of the AVID program is to prepare students most underrepresented in postsecondary education for four year college eligibility. The means to that end are to restructure the teaching methodology of entire schools to make college preparatory curricula accessible to almost all students. Therefore the focus has been to develop a comprehensive staff development training program which emphasizes the California Frameworks with specific student achievement goals.

The hub of the AVID program lies at the San Diego County Office of Education (SDCOE). The Coordinators from the County Office work directly with postsecondary institutions, the State Department of Education (SDE), San Diego County and out-of-county school districts and school sites

When Mary Catherine Swanson was still at Clairemont High School, she collaborated with teachers at Clairemont and also with the University of California, at San Diego (UCSD) through Charles Cooper, Director of Writing at UCSD.

The connection with UCSD has changed through the years. Currently the research Hugh Mehan, Director of the Teacher Education Program at UCSD, is conducting with the data collected about AVID is not only a source of information for SDCOE but is also the springboard for the discussions that he leads on the implications of his findings concerning effective education, especially for underrepresented students. San Diego State University (SDSU) has been actively involved with AVID since 1987 when it began giving tutors priority registration (allowing the tutors to schedule their classes outside of AVID work time); then SDSU extended this privilege to incoming AVID freshmen. SDSU's involvement grew in 1988 when it offered a mythology class to AVID students at a high school site. The following year four such courses were offered to AVID seniors for college credit. In its 1989-90 college catalogue, SDSU has designated three general education courses as AVID. The purpose is not to change the content but to allow AVID students who graduated from different sites to meet and form the study groups where they can continue to work collaboratively. The latest connection with postsecondary institutions is between a middle school and a community college. A philosophy professor taught a weekly philosophy class to eighth graders and has plans to teach a critical thinking course to AVID Coordinators through a local university.

AVID's connection with the State Department of Education began in 1986 when it received funding for disseminating the program. That funding continues. In 1990 Mary Catherine Swanson was named State Director for AVID, and her job extends to directing the implementation of the program to schools statewide in addition to her work of administering the sixty-six AVID programs in San Diego County. Next year nineteen junior high schools in the county and eight school districts out of the county will be implementing AVID programs for the first time. Coordinators from the SDCOE will be working with district and site administrators as well as visiting schools both within and without the county.

The AVID program began in Clairemont High School in 1980 when the demographics of the school changed dramatically as the result of court-ordered bussing. Mary Catherine Swanson created the AVID program so that

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the minority students could have access to a rigorous college preparatory curriculum. Since AVID began at Clairemont High School, 238 AVID students have graduated and 225 have gone on to college--89% to four year institutions and 11% to two year institutions. Swanson's philosophy from the beginning was that in order for the program to succeed it needed to work within the systems already in place, rather than in isolation. Success of the AVID program at Clairemont came to the attention of the San Diego County Office of Education. Mary Catherine Swanson was hired by SDCOE where her new role in 1986 was to disseminate the program to other schools in the county.

Swanson contacted districts, developed a training program and wrote a detailed *AVID Handbook and Curriculum Guide*. In 1986 monthly AVID Coordinator trainings were held. By 1988 the next step of the AVID training model expanded to include subject area teachers and provide them with the methodology that has proven successful in AVID. By the summer of 1988 trainings included subject area teachers, counselors, tutors and administrators.

Currently AVID serves 3200 seventh through twelfth graders at sixty-six sites. The ethnic breakdown of the students is 49% Latino, 19% African American, 17% Caucasian, 13% Pacific Islander, 1% Native American, and 1% are designated "other." Thirty percent of the students come from families that receive public assistance. The students in the programs are guided by the tutors, teachers and administrators at their schools who have been trained in AVID methodology. Five hundred and twenty seven administrators, teachers and tutors from 34 districts and 122 sites participated in training during the 1989-90 school year; the majority are teachers.

Students in the AVID program are enrolled in a college preparatory sequence of courses and one section of AVID. In the AVID class, students are given academic support by working in tutor-led study groups using writing and the inquiry method to learn the material from their academic classes. The tutors, college students many of whom are AVID graduates, usually work three days a week. Some non tutorial days are spent on enrichment activities such as, listening to speakers, visiting colleges or going on cultural field trips. On other non-tutorial days, students work on AVID writing assignments in the different discourse modes and on appropriate grade level study skills. Freshmen and sophomores may be preparing for the PSAT, while juniors may be preparing for the SAT and seniors writing college essays.

There are several programs offered for the teachers and support staff. The SDCOE holds monthly meetings for coordinators, two subject area trainings for subject area teachers and two regional site team trainings during the school year. An intensive week long AVID Summer Institute with ten training strands is held annually. These include subject area trainings where teachers are trained to use AVID methodology (writing as a tool of learning, the inquiry method and collaborative learning) in their content areas; alignment to the state curriculum frameworks is stressed. Experienced site coordinators learn leadership skills i.e. cognitive coaching; new coordinators attend an AVID implementation training and counselors and administrators learn about their roles in AVID. In addition to the training strands, school site teams, composed of the coordinator, counselor, administrator and subject area teachers, are presented with data about their sites and given guidance in creating a site plan.

The training program is the responsibility of the staff at the SDCOE which includes a Statewide Director for AVID, a project specialist, a resource teacher, a rotating teacher on loan and two secretaries. Each site has an

administrator, AVID counselor, AVID coordinator and five subject area teachers.

When SDCOE coordinators visit schools and meet with the students and the site teams, the site needs are assessed. Also at monthly meetings, AVID coordinators are asked what they would find helpful at future trainings. Information from these discussions is used in planning future trainings.

An ongoing evaluation of the school programs is also accomplished through visitation by the monitoring teams. However, the most important evaluation of the AVID program is how well it is working for the students.

In 1989, SDCOE and UCSD created a 102 item countywide student survey evaluation. Items elicit information about the background of AVID participants, the number of college preparatory classes they are enrolled in, the aspects of the program they find most helpful and the amount of homework they do. Hugh Mehan has corroborated the results of the student surveys and is extrapolating a variety of information such as the correlation between ethnicity and achievement, the education of the family and student academic achievement and the performance of AVID students versus non-AVID students in specific courses, such as intermediate algebra. Mehan and Swanson reported the results of the research at the American Educational Research Association (AERA) Convention in April 1990. AVID has made impact on students, teachers and sites where it is in operation. Thirty-two hundred students are enrolled in college preparatory classes who would otherwise not be in these classes. Ninety-nine percent of AVID graduates have entered postsecondary institutions upon graduation, 89% to four year colleges and universities.

Schools with AVID programs have changed significantly both in terms of student progress, teaching methodology and schoolwide self esteem. The number of graduates who have completed a college preparatory curriculum has increased at all the high schools with AVID graduates Ten of the fifteen sites with graduating seniors have increased this number by over 100%. AVID has created the need for more sections of advanced and honors courses. These changes have affected the self image of schools that previously had few students entering college upon graduation. Most importantly, AVID has given underrepresented students access to a college education.

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